

House Passes Michaud Bill Helping Homeless Veterans

Tuesday, June 16 2009

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Congressman Mike Michaud, Chairman of the House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Health, applauded passage of H.R. 403, the Homes for Heroes Act of 2009, which would provide shelter for homeless veterans and homeless veteran families. Michaud joined with Congressman Al Green (TX-09) to introduce the bill on January 9th of this year. A full summary of the bill is attached.

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An annual U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) report conducted each year estimates that Maine currently has over 140 homeless veterans.

“The House voted today to give our homeless veterans a benefit they have earned – the promise of a home for themselves and their family,” said Michaud. “I strongly urge the Senate to take up this bill as soon as possible. If we can make this bill law, more than 130,000 of our bravest Americans will be one step closer to being in a stable living environment.”

According to the VA, nearly 131,000 homeless Americans are adult veterans who live on the streets, in shelters or in community based organizations. And approximately twice that many may experience homelessness over the course of a year. Many more low income veterans and veteran families live at the margins and are at risk of becoming homeless in the absence of permanent housing solutions and supportive services. In fact, 1.5 million veterans have incomes that fall below the federal poverty level, including 634,000 with incomes below 50 percent of the poverty line.

“This bill does more than merely bring to light the struggles that many veterans face. It provides tangible solutions so that veterans can get off the streets and get into sustainable housing,” said Michaud. “Giving our veterans a chance to have a home is the least we can do for those who fought for us. As Chairman of the Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health, I will continue to work to provide all of our veterans with the assistance that they need.”

Many homeless veterans are not connected to the vital housing and supportive services that they need. VA currently reaches only 33 percent of those veterans in need, while the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV)-member community-based organizations reaches only 35 percent. This means that there are 150,000 homeless veterans who do not have access to these critical housing and supportive services programs every year.

Each VA Medical Center has a homeless veteran coordinator who veterans can contact for services and help. Maine’s homeless veteran coordinator at Togus VA Medical Center can be reached by calling (207) 623-8411 extension 4344. Veterans needing help can also go to the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans website to locate assistance available in their state: <http://www.nchv.org/wheretogo.cfm>.

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H.R. 403, the Homes for Heroes Act, would:

- Establish the position of Special Assistant for Veterans Affairs within the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).
- Establish permanent supportive housing and services for very low-income veterans and their families through a \$200 million assistance program.
- Authorize HUD to provide housing assistance to private nonprofit organizations and consumer cooperatives to expand the supply of permanent affordable housing.
- Require HUD to coordinate with the VA to provide supportive services tailored to the needs of the very low-income veteran families occupying supportive housing.
- Expand the highly successful HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program, authorizing 20,000 vouchers annually and making the program permanent.
- Place additional priority on veterans and require all local public housing agencies to develop plans to address the needs of homeless veterans.
- Authorize \$1 million in HUD grants to assist housing and service providers to execute their housing projects for very low-income veteran families.
- Require HUD to submit a comprehensive annual report to Congress on the housing needs of homeless veterans.